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WOOD CARVING, ADAPTED FOR BOTH THE AMATEUR AND THE PROFESSIONAL.

BY W. N. BROWN.

Author of "Wood Turning for Amateurs," "Working in Brass," "The Arch, Vault and Dome," "The Ancient Ecclesiastical Wood Work of England," "The History of Decorative Art," "A Manual of Wood Engraving," etc., etc.

CHAPTER VII.—ON THE PROCURING OF DESIGNS AND THE CUTTING OF SHIELDS.

RESUMING my series of articles after a long but unavoidable hiatus, I shall pass on from the general cutting of monograms, with which I last treated, to that of special monograms, a very good specimen of which I illustrate at figure 37, the working out of which will afford the carver some practice. Before, however, going on with this I must have a few words to say upon the manner of procuring designs, as this will be especially useful to the beginner and amateur. Briefly put, it may

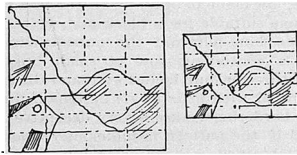


Fig. 37.

be stated that three sources are open to him or her (for I hope that ladies will be induced to take up this highly artistic branch of decorative art work), viz., by purchase, either of old or new specimens, by copying good examples of the old school for preference, and by own designs. This last might still be further divided into those designs copied from natural objects, which are always to be recommended, and upon which the young pupil especially cannot have too much practice, and those which are entirely original or arranged by the carver himself. Sheets of designs, of various designations, can generally be purchased, and those are to be recommended, provided good designs are selected. In this, of course, the carver's artistic knowledge or innate natural perception will come into play, for which we can give him no help.

Printed designs are generally upon thin cardboard or stout paper, and the best plan, before starting on work, is to procure some ordinary tracing paper or thin cloth of the same size as the design, and placing the latter, face uppermost, on a drawing board; place the tracing paper or cloth over it, and fasten down evenly and firmly by drawing pins. Then take a somewhat soft black lead pencil, sharpen it to a fine point, and trace the design upon the tracing paper carefully. Then unfasten the sheets, lay the tracing paper face downwards, and paste over the back as quickly as possible with a tolerably thick, but not a limpy paste, spreading it out as thinly and evenly as possible. Now place it upon piece of wood it is intended to carve at once, and very carefully rub it down with a clean, soft rag, starting from the middle and rubbing outward to the edges. This must be done carefully, but quickly, and there must be no blisters. Now turn the piece of wood face downward, place on it some heavy weights, and leave it to dry. Should it be found that the wood has warped through a superfluity of moisture, place the wood before a fire with the convex side to the heat, and it will resume its proper shape in a short time, but it must be removed at once, or it will warp in a contrary action. If paste be used, do not mix alum with it.

Should it be necessary to make the design larger or smaller than the copy, the drawing can be "squared off, which is done by dividing the margin into any number of equal parts, bearing in mind that the greater the number the easier the task. Then take a piece of paper according to the size desired, and divide this into the same number of equal divisions as the copy, only larger or smaller as the case may be. The portions of the copy found in each square can then be copied by pen or pencil into the corresponding squares on the blank paper, and if ordinary pains be taken, a fair copy of the original should be the result. I have shown the process at figure 37. This, of course, is only a rough sketch, of no use to the wood carver, but simply given to illustrate the process only, which can be applied to any picture, no matter how complicated. For wood or metal, get a wooden frame, a little larger than the article to be copied, and on this mark out divisions. Then make small holes, and through these pass tightly thin white string, or if the frame is small, thread. Then place it in front of the object to be copied, and about a foot from it. Then on the drawing paper have a similar sketch of the frame and divisions, and then transfer to the paper a drawing of the various portions of the object seen through the corresponding spaces of the wooden frame. A fairly satisfactory drawing should be the result, especially if the oper-

ator is at all versed in model drawing. In cases where sketches have to be made from objects in situ this plan must be adopted if the carver is not a draughtsman, but if he has had any artistic training, the better plan is to make a sketch, and redraw it, filling in from notes later on.

Supposing that the wood has "cast" from too much pasting, or not being seasoned, the wood carver can proceed by "double tracing," which is effected thus: Rub off the surface with a piece of ordinary paper either with black lead, black chalk, red chalk, or red ochre, then shake the paper quickly so that no superfluous dust is left. Then lay this paper down, the coated side being bottommost, on the wood, place the tracing on the tracing paper above it, and fasten both to the intended board by means of pins. Now go over all the lines of the tracing with a hard pencil, and with ordinary care the operator will find, when the two papers are raised, that the lines of the design have been transferred to the wood in red or black, as the case may be, the black or red chalks being adaptable for light woods, white chalk or crayon being employed, of course, for ebony and such like dark wood.

The second plan suggested above was by the copying of good examples of wood carving, which, as a rule, are more or less plentiful in most places. Speaking generally, good specimens are to be found in a large number of churches, cathedrals, and museums, and in large towns very good pieces are to be found at times, in shop windows of old furniture and curiosity dealers, and to make these of use to the wood carver he must possess skill in drawing. The third plan, which will make a call on the operator's inventive powers recommended is to produce original designs. Very good designs for panels in high relief can be obtained by artistically grouping bunches of flowers, sprays of trees, ears of corn, long grasses, dead game, etc., and then making a fine sketch of them. Do not endeavor to get too much in a design, as no matter how well it will look in the original grouping or sketch, it will probably not come out so well in the wood. Especially should this excess of elaboration be avoided by an amateur. Fruits also make good copies, and in fact the whole boundless field of nature is open, and as the ancient carvers went to it for inspiration, the modern day disciple can hardly do better than do likewise.

Panels are a very favorite form of wood carving, and a useful one beside, and there are a large number of specimens of real good work still extant. They also allow of the student practising two branches of his art in one piece of work—namely, monogram cutting and shield carving, the blanks of the latter serving for the reception of the former. These panels are only a corruption of "pane," and were originally employed for the lights of a window, but are now almost exclusively confined to the sunken compartments of wainscoting, ceilings, panelings, galleries, etc., and their corresponding features in stonework, notably of the Gothic order of architecture. Of the Norman style no modern panels remain, and specimens of the early English style are not numerous. In decorated style wood paneling is frequently enriched with tracery, and sometimes with foliage, or with shields and heraldic devices. In the perpendicular style the tracery and ornaments in wood paneling are more minute than at an earlier period, and towards the end of the style these enrichments were carved on the panel instead of being added to it—a far better plan in every respect. A species of ornamentation was introduced toward the end of the perpendicular period, which became very popular, and which consists of a series of straight mouldings worked upon the panel so arranged and with the ends so formed as to represent the folds of linen. They were usually called the "linen pattern" and I shall refer to them in a future chapter. Towards the decadence of Gothic architecture

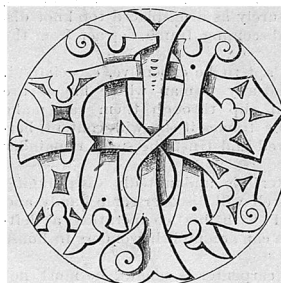


Fig. 38. Monogram for Shield—H. J. R.

paneling ceased largely to be employed in stonework, though still largely used in wainscoting. Some of the first specimens of this description of wood carving is to be found in Westminster Abbey. Reverting to the monogram given above at figure 38, these were generally utilized on a panel over the entrance of the hall, the coat-of-arms being sometimes added, or, in some cases, this being carved in stone at the outer gate, and the family initials being carved at the inner entrance. To cut the specimen illustrated, carefully draw it either on the wood or by pasted paper, but I prefer the former as supplying the real lines from which to cut. Then proceed with a small thin chisel to outline it all carefully but not too deeply, then cut the highest parts first, going then to the next raised, and finishing with the deepest last, except the ground or mat. It is better to work this

THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

way than to cut the deepest portions first, as, carefully watched, the effect can be retained all through, as if the deep portions are cut first, and cut too deeply, the whole of the remainder has to be gone over in order to make it in keeping, in cases at times to the spoiling of the whole panel. Students should always bear in mind that they can take a bit off if it is wanted, but not put it on. This monogram looks very effective if carefully cut, and the copies of the letters must be kept very sharp, the ground being finished off smooth. Do not sand-paper it, as it will destroy the fine edges.

In the specimens of shield panels which I show at figures 39, 40, and 41, I have drawn upon one of the richest points in the world, viz: Westminster Abbey; my principal object in so doing being to lay before my readers what are unquestionably genuine specimens of ancient English wood carving. Another reason for selecting these is because, as is usual with mediæval work, each of the panels has a shield in the center, which is incorporated into the lid or front of a box or casket would serve for the donor's or recipient's initials, date, etc. In cutting these panels, I would recommend if it is procurable, and although it is somewhat hard to work, a piece of thoroughly seasoned English oak, of about one inch in thickness. Then draw the design, and then outline carefully and sharply, being particular in the ultimate carving to clear the corners well. In the first it will be observed that the exterior and interior edges are beveled, and to preserve the evenness and sharpness of these will try the operator's ability somewhat. In the second specimen these edges are still further

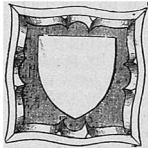


Fig. 39. Shield from the Monument of John of Elchoan, in Westminster Abbey.

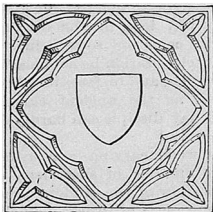


Fig. 40. Shield from the Monument of Sir Charles Daubeny, in Westminster Abbey.

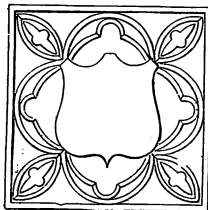


Fig. 41. Shield from a Monument in Westminster Abbey.

accentuated, in that there are more of them, the corners especially calling for careful cutting. In the third panel the same characteristics are still preserved, but the intricacies are still more complicated, and will call on the carver to use his smaller tools. The corners are somewhat delicate and will require some care and pains to successfully negotiate. With the cutting of these panels the student or apprentice will have more than sufficient to last him till my next chapter, when I shall have something to say upon "linen" and scroll patterns, etc.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

HOME-MADE FRAMES.

BY H. S. FLEMING.

THE relations which exist between a pretty face and the tresses which surmount it are much the same as those between a picture and its frame. Both face and picture may be beautiful, but just as surely as a misplaced top-knot disfigures the one, so does an unbecoming frame detract from the other.

But becoming frames are apt to be expensive, especially if the picture be a large one, and any woman whose fingers are as nimble as the dollars that slip through them can make very artistic and even handsome frames if she will content herself with the work she can do well and trust the small remainder to a skillful carpenter.

"First catch your carpenter" is undoubtedly discouraging advice, but a little patient search will discover some handy and accommodating workman, and with his co-operation a deft-fingered artistic-minded woman can accomplish wonders in house decoration.

Assuming, then, that the carpenter is caught, he must not be worried with constant appeals for little "dabs" of work. Wait until you have several things for him to do and you will find that a wholesale method of business will save his temper and your money.

We will suppose that you have received from the carpenter five fine frames of varying sizes, made from boards three-quarters of an inch thick. Have the rabbet for the glass and picture just half the thickness of the frame, and about half an inch broad, to give room for tacking the plush or other covering neatly over the

edge. If the largest frame is for an etching that will show to advantage in a white setting, cover the pine with a quarter of an inch coating of white lead and give it a very rough finish such as is seen in modern rough plastered walls. The proper effect may be produced with a palette knife by pressing it down on the paint and suddenly withdrawing it. While the paint is still fresh sift some gold powder diagonally across the frame, beginning very lightly just above the lower left hand corner, and increasing the gilt, until, when the lower right hand corner is reached the gilt is thick enough to cover the paint. The effect is a diagonal shading from pure white to clear gilt and very pretty.

Another frame is covered with the plush and bordered with the flat brass chains which have long been in vogue for looping back curtains and portieres. The chains are tacked on. Those of oxidized silver look well on crimson plush and do not tarnish like brass.

An artistic frame for a quaint, old-time etching is made by covering it with India silk of some dim, faded looking pattern. The silk is tacked on in scant crosswise plaits, and the corners finished with a little band of the silk fastened with brass nails. Such frames are now made to order by all the best framing houses.

Another frame suitable for a black and white picture is covered with marine blue felt, and the outside edge of the frame bordered with a continuous row of small brass nails. The frame should be three or four inches wide and the space inside the border be decorated with *fleur de lis* designs in brass nails.

Wall paper bordering makes a very deceptive covering for a pine frame, and if the pattern is judiciously chosen very good effects may be obtained. Flour paste must be used, and the bordering pasted before it is trimmed or fitted. Otherwise the paste overflows at the edges and smears the pattern. Flowered cretonne is stylish for bedroom frames and *Lincrusta* borderings are decorative on frames that are to be gilded or painted. Old fashioned wooden beads put on with brass nails for a projecting border are ornamental and do away with the home-made look. Any old frame of walnut or stained wood may be improved by giving it three coats of white lead and gilding the inside molding.

Home-made has become a synonym for badly made, but there is no reason why an intelligent woman who is willing to give the time necessary for careful, exact work should not produce satisfactory results in such simple matters. In making frames, use the smallest size upholsterer's tacks, the best glue—not mucilage—an awl, and a great deal of patience in placing straight rows of tacks, and a conscientious taste in the management of color and design.

IN some of the old French furniture of a rich and costly character we meet with medallions of enameled china in the panels, presenting portraits, hunting scenes, etc. The preservation of these uninjured has been due to carved borders or to their conforming to the contour of the panels. Years since Eastlake adopted the idea of introducing decorative tiles into his furniture, though not with the same fine effects, in imitation of porcelain. Previously wedgewood medallions had been inserted on mahogany panels of sideboards and other furniture. They relieved the heavy aspect of massive mahogany furniture, and with Eastlake tiles may be judged a legitimate form of ornamentation. An imitation of these tiles may be made in the following manner which produces fair effects. The work is to be done on the wood. Stencils of the required designs are cut out of strong manila paper and varnished with thin shellac. A ground is first laid on the wood, composed of turpentine, oil and color, which is afterwards sand-papered with the finest paper. Choice tube colors, mixed japanner's gold size, and turpentine are used for stenciling. A coat of finishing varnish over the pattern concludes the work. Another process is to fill the grain of the wood with thin shellac, which is allowed to dry and is then sand-papered. Stenciling may be discarded and finer work done by hand.

